
Interview
General William M. Hoge

Background and Early Childhood

Q: What we'd like to do on this is just to get a general overview of your entire career, but first going back to your family influences. I'd be interested in hearing more about your father and his knowing Will Rogers.

A: Well, that was quite incidental.

Q: You're from a military family, I believe.

A: No. My father was always connected with military schools, but he was not an officer himself. He was in the National Guard. He wore a uniform, but he couldn't salute. He was a teacher; he was principal at Kemper Military School in Boonville [Missouri]. I was born on that campus and grew up there until I was ten years old, when my father bought an interest in Wentworth [Military School], which is up in Lexington, near Kansas City. He bought a half interest in that, and he went up there as associate to the superintendent, which led to superintendent. He stayed there until 1916 when he sold his interest and moved to Culver Military Academy [Canton, Missouri], where he remained as a department head until his retirement ten or fifteen years later.

Q: Was your father a native of Missouri?

A: No, he was born in Virginia, but he moved out there as a young boy. He spent all of his life there up until later. He first was teaching there. He was principal of Kemper and was devoted to old Mr. Kemper who had founded the school, but later he became the principal of the school. Then later he sold his interest in that school, and he went with the University of Missouri for a couple of years. That was with an extension course. Then he bought a half interest in Wentworth up at Lexington, which is only about 100 miles west of there—just outside of Kansas City. We lived

there until I went to West Point. It was there [Wentworth] that I began my association with the military. I spent about six years as a cadet and student at Wentworth.

Q: That was essentially a military elementary and high school?

A: It wasn't very good scholastically, but I graduated from it when I was 16 years old. Then I took a couple of extra years primarily to play football for a while. I didn't learn anything-then I went to Brandon's-it was then at Highland Falls, New York. You know old man Brandon-he founded that Brandon's Preparatory and ran it for a number of years. It's owned now by, well, the same one as Sullivan in Cornwall. Jerry Sullivan owns it now, but the name has changed because Sullivan sold his interest to a naval man who opened a Brandon's school down near Annapolis or Washington someplace. But that isn't the same Brandon's school. It has the name, and he was associated with Sullivan. Sullivan sold the name but founded his own school up at Cornwall, New York, and he still runs that.

Q: I understand it's quite a good school. You went to prep school then for one year before going into West Point?

A: I went to prep school and I took my examination from Brandon's Prep School up at Highland Falls.

Q: You mentioned you played two more years of football. Was that at Kemper where you stayed on two more years?

A: No, at Wentworth. Well, I was too young to go into West Point, and I got my appointment to go there when I was 17. I didn't enter until I was 18, but I had that year and I finished that football season when I was 17, I guess, at Wentworth and then went up to Brandon's. No, I was 17—it was in 1911. I graduated in 1910 from Wentworth and then I went to stay on one full year as a post-graduate at Wentworth until I got old enough to take the examination, or to get my appointment to West Point. Then I spent a half a year that fall at Wentworth and then went up to Brandon's and took my examination from there. I would never have gotten into West Point without going to Brandon's. He had a wonderful course. He

was a tough old devil—swearing. He had a wild group, too, that were there but he disciplined them, handled them. The old man would walk down the aisle in the morning and give us all hell. But he was very thorough. He wrote a lot of books on the entrance examinations that had been passed and we studied. There's where I really learned all I knew when I went to West Point.

Q: So you found that it was not only worthwhile but essential?

A: Well, I would never have gotten in without it.

Q: I believe you received a congressional appointment?

A: I had one from a senator from Missouri. Got that myself through friends who were lawyers and doctors and bankers around Lexington. They got it for me. I didn't meet Senator Reed until after I had been graduated from West Point. In St. Louis I met him when I was, I believe, a major or a captain—I guess a major at that time—but my appointment was entirely through friends.

West Point

Q: When did you decide that you wanted to go to West Point?

A: Well, I knew it all the time, plus the influence of Wentworth. One of the most influential men [on me] I had there at school. Of course, I had a brother [Benjamin F. Hoge] who went to West Point, and he was captain of the football team in 1914. No, he graduated in 1914, but he was captain in 1913. That was one reason, but I would have gone anyway. But it was a colonel, well, he wasn't a colonel at that time, I think he was a lieutenant or captain of cavalry in the Army, who was detailed at Wentworth as the PMS&T [professor of military science and tactics] and he also acted as commandant. He was the greatest man with boys I ever knew, and he took me under his wing. He gave me his dog, he let me ride his horses, and he was just the greatest chap I ever knew. We used to go hunting with him and everything. He was much older than I was—he was a graduate of VMI but he had been in the Army since about 1901 or 1902; I don't know when he entered. He was a great person, and